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FM AMEMBASSY BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3499  
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS PRIORITY  
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT PRIORITY 0013  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 0480  
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV PRIORITY 0041  
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN PRIORITY 0018  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 0089  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 0025  
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME PRIORITY 0024  
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON PRIORITY 0067  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 0399  
RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NICOSIA PRIORITY 0007  
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 0022  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN 000440

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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/MTS, IO/UNP, AND PM  
SINGAPORE ALSO FOR DAO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/30/2016

TAGS: MOPS MARR PREL UN IS LE BX

SUBJECT: BRUNEI'S UNIFIL DEPLOYMENT: MILITARY PREPARATIONS  
ADVANCED BUT REALISTIC ON THE POLITICS

REF: A. BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN 415 (NOTAL)

1B. STATE 134133

1C. USUN 1545

1D. BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN 398 (NOTAL)

Classified By: Amb. Emil Skodon, reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

SUMMARY

11. (C) In meetings August 29 and 30, senior GOB officials indicated to us that plans are well advanced for the Royal Brunei Armed Forces to fulfill the Sultan's pledge to contribute troops to UNIFIL should UNSYG Annan request a Bruneian contribution. They said that they understood that Israel had not yet approved a Bruneian contribution, and so Brunei had not yet made a formal offer of troops as a nod to Israeli sensitivities. We expect Brunei will remain in "wait and see" mode as regards UNIFIL but will be ready to make a small contribution of 100-200 mechanized infantry troops in conjunction with Indonesian and/or Malaysian forces if asked to do so. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Royal Brunei Armed Forces (RBAF) planning for a potential UNIFIL contribution is well advanced. In separate conversations with RBAF Commander Major General Halbi, Director of Operations Colonel Jofri, and Deputy Minister of Defense Pehin Yasmin, Ambassador and DCM learned that the RBAF has been getting ready to carry out a phased deployment of 100-200 troops as part of a tripartite Malaysian, Indonesian, and Bruneian force. A medical contingent would be the first RBAF unit to deploy, followed by two mechanized infantry platoons and associated equipment: armored personnel carriers, trucks, and four-wheel drive vehicles. RBAF planners intend to work with the UK to move the vehicles via sea lift to Cyprus for staging into Lebanon; they estimate a total transit of 24 days. DepMinDef Yasmin told us that airlift via leased Antonovs was another possible option for moving the vehicles. The RBAF is also intending to stage its troops through Cyprus, presumably via RAF Akrotiri.

¶3. (C) Our RBAF and MinDef contacts were well aware of Israeli objections to UNIFIL contributions from countries which do not maintain diplomatic relations with Israel, and also that the Israelis appeared to object more strongly to Malaysian than to Indonesian involvement in UNIFIL. In response to our questions, they said that an RBAF deployment in conjunction with Indonesia alone would still be doable. Colonel Jofri said it would require a change in planning assumptions but the RBAF could adjust relatively quickly. DepMinDef Yasmin told us that in some ways it was easier for RBAF mechanized infantry to work with the Indonesians rather than the Malaysians, since both Brunei and Indonesia operate the same French-made APC's. (Comment: The RBAF has 35 VAB and 20 Shorland APC's in its inventory.)

¶4. (C) DepMinDef Yasmin told us he has reached an agreement with New Zealand for NZ forces to provide accelerated peacekeeping training to the RBAF, which has only limited peace monitoring experience in Aceh and Mindanao. Yasmin expected the Kiwi trainers to arrive in Brunei within a week to ten days to commence the training program. He believed this would be useful even if the RBAF did not end up deploying to UNIFIL, since it would support the previously stated MinDef goal of having a dedicated PKO unit of at least platoon size trained and operational by 2007.

¶5. (C) Notwithstanding the RBAF preparations, the GOB is not pushing for an early invitation to UNIFIL and is well aware of the diplomatic complications involving a UNIFIL contribution. Dato Haji Shofry, Permanent Secretary for Bilateral Relations at the MFAT, told us that the GOB understands the political environment and knows about

BANDAR SER 00000440 002 OF 002

Israel's objections to accepting contributions from some Muslim nations. That is why Brunei has not made a formal offer of forces and is waiting for a request from UNSYG Kofi Annan. Shofry said that normally the receiving country approved PKO participants, but on a practical basis, the GOB understood Israel's desire as a combatant to vet the PKO force. He avoided a direct answer to our question about whether the GOB would be willing to move forward with a deployment over Israeli objections, but said it would be reluctant to see "our boys" in a situation where one of the recent combatants was opposed to the Bruneian presence.

COMMENT

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¶6. (C) With a clear readiness to make good on the Sultan's commitment to contribute forces to UNIFIL, the GOB has accepted a realistic "wait and see" attitude to deal with this operation's political complexities. Our interlocutors all expressed a desire to participate in the mission, but were careful to indicate that their willingness not be seen as an attempt to force anything on Israel. Current efforts to improve training and readiness of the RBAF's PKO-capable units are a clear sign that the GOB is serious about its commitment to play a wider role in international multilateral operations.

SKODON